Medical Group Sues D.C. Government On Mayday Arrests

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The Washington chapter of the Medical Committee for Human Rights filed a lawsuit against the District government yesterday, contending that the city's police broke an agreement to permit medical teams to operate freely during the Mayday antiwar demonstrations here last spring.

Demanding $110,000 in damages, the group charged that its medical personnel had been harassed, arrested and imprisoned during the protests.

The lawsuit was the latest in a series alleging false arrests and other improper police conduct during the demonstrations, when a record 12,000 arrests were made to clear the city's streets in the face of a threat to shut down the government.

Named as individual plaintiffs were doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers and others who served as "medics" to treat those injured during the mass protests.

They claimed that individual police officers disregarded a specific agreement between the medical committee and D.C. Police Chief Jerry V. Wilson permitting an emergency medical tent at Mayday's encampment in West Potomac Park to be dismantled.

Instead, according to the lawsuit, when police were clearing the park early on Sunday, May 2, they dragged doctors from the tent and arrested them, causing medical equipment to be damaged and lost.

Despite a promise by the D.C. office of civil defense that the incident would not be repeated, the Medical Committee said, its medics were again mistreated on Monday, May 3, when 7,000 people were arrested.

Some doctors were arrested while wearing official armbands marked "D.C. Public Health Service Emergency," according to the lawsuit, and some wounded demonstrators were loaded aboard police buses rather than being sent to hospitals for treatment.

Paula A. Cox, a Trinity College student who was working with one of the medical teams, charged that after her arrest plastic handcuffs were tightened around her wrists until her hands turned blue.

Those sent to jail, the suit charge, were "incarcerated under brutal and inhumane conditions."

In some instances, it added, police "wantonly attacked" clearly marked vans used to transport medical teams.

The Medical Committee, represented by attorney Elliott C. Lichtman, alleged that its rights under the First and Fifth Amendments, as well as the agreement with Chief Wilson, had been violated by the police.

It asked a reassertion of its right to serve as an emergency medical program during demonstrations, as it has since the antiwar march on the Pentagon in 1967.

The lawsuit, which named chief Grant Wright of the park police as well as Wilson, the District government and unnamed police officers as defendants, was assigned to U.S. District Court Judge June L. Green.

Court proceedings on it, as well as on other lawsuits growing out of the Mayday demonstrations, are expected ruling from the U.S. Court of Appeals here that the District to be affected by the recent may be held legally and financial responsible for improper police actions.